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Aanchal: Strengthening Family and Community-Based Care for Vulnerable Children in Nepal

A comprehensive initiative to transition orphaned and abandoned children from institutional care into supportive family and community environments across three districts in Nepal.

Executive Summary

The 'Aanchal' project addresses the critical developmental needs of orphaned, abandoned, and separated children in Nepal by shifting the paradigm from institutional childcare to nurturing family- and community-based environments. Operating over a 24-month period across the Kathmandu Valley, Lalitpur, and Kavrepalanchok districts, this initiative will partner with local child welfare authorities, community-based organizations, and caregivers to prevent unnecessary family separation, facilitate safe kinship and foster care placements, and provide comprehensive reintegration support. By combining rigorous case management, psychosocial counseling, and targeted livelihood support for vulnerable households, Aanchal aims to ensure that children grow up in safe, permanent, and loving homes. The project anticipates directly impacting 300 children and 150 at-risk families, establishing a sustainable, community-led model of child protection that aligns with international guidelines on deinstitutionalization.

Background and Context

Despite significant socioeconomic progress in recent decades, Nepal continues to struggle with high rates of child abandonment, institutionalization, and family separation driven by poverty, natural disasters, migration, and social marginalization. Historically, institutional care (orphanages and children's homes) has been viewed as the primary response to child vulnerability. However, extensive global and local research demonstrates that institutionalization inflicts severe, long-lasting cognitive, emotional, and social damage on developing children. The Government of Nepal, recognizing these harms, has enacted the National Child Rights Act (2018) and a Ten-Year National Strategic Plan for the Deinstitutionalization of Children's Homes. Nevertheless, local child welfare committees and community organizations often lack the technical capacity, specialized personnel, and financial resources required to safely reintegrate children into families or establish robust foster care systems. This project steps into that critical gap by empowering communities to take active ownership of child protection and care reform.

Problem Statement

Thousands of children in Nepal reside in residential childcare facilities, with estimates suggesting that a significant majority have at least one living parent and could be successfully reintegrated into family care given adequate socioeconomic support. When children are placed in institutions without individualized case management, they face heightened risks of neglect, abuse, and developmental delays, while also missing out on the social capital and familial bonds essential for adult life. Conversely, families living in extreme poverty frequently surrender their children to institutional facilities under the false impression that they will receive better education and nutrition, unaware of the psychological toll of separation. Furthermore, the existing social work workforce in Nepal is severely overextended, making rigorous pre-placement assessments, home studies, and post-placement monitoring nearly impossible without dedicated NGO intervention and capacity-building support.

Goal

To promote the holistic well-being, rights, and permanent family-based care of orphaned, abandoned, and separated children in target districts of Nepal through sustainable community-driven reintegration and prevention mechanisms.

Objectives

- Establish a district-level network and referral pathway in coordination with local government to identify, assess, and support children at risk of separation or institutionalization within 24 months.
- Safely reintegrate or transition 150 institutionalized children into biological, kinship, or vetted foster families with comprehensive case management.
- Provide emergency family preservation grants, vocational training, and livelihood support to 150 economically vulnerable households to prevent child abandonment.
- Deliver trauma-informed psychosocial support, remedial education, and life-skills training to 300 children and their primary caregivers.
- Train 60 local community leaders, child club members, and municipal social workers on child protection standards, positive parenting, and alternative care guidelines.

Project Description

The Aanchal project utilizes a holistic, human-rights-based approach to child protection, grounded in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Implemented in close collaboration with the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) and Local Child Rights Committees (LCRCs), the project operates through three interconnected pillars: Prevention, Reintegration, and Post-Placement Support. In the Prevention phase, social workers identify families on the brink of separation and deliver targeted economic and psychosocial interventions. In the Reintegration phase, professional case workers conduct thorough best-interest determinations, mapping and assessing biological or kinship networks for children currently residing in partner children's homes. For children with no viable family tracing options, the project develops supported foster care models. Throughout the process, the project engages schools, women's groups, and youth clubs to foster a protective community environment that destigmatizes alternative care and monitors child well-being at the grassroots level.

Key Activities

- Conduct comprehensive household vulnerability assessments and baseline mapping of children in four targeted residential care facilities.
- Design and implement individualized family reintegration and care plans for 150 children, including medical screenings and educational placement.
- Distribute conditional, milestone-based livelihood grants and financial literacy training to 150 vulnerable families to ensure sustainable household income.
- Facilitate weekly community-based parent-support circles focusing on positive parenting, child rights, and non-violent communication.
- Establish child-friendly drop-in centers offering remedial tutoring, peer support, and professional counseling services.
- Organize capacity-building workshops and technical training modules for 60 local stakeholders, including municipal officials, social workers, and community volunteers.

Expected Outcomes

- 150 children successfully transitioned from institutional care into safe, nurturing family and community environments.
- Zero instances of re-abandonment or documented domestic abuse among project-supported families, verified through systematic monitoring.
- A 40% measurable increase in household income and economic stability among 150 at-risk families receiving livelihood support.
- 300 children demonstrating improved emotional regulation, school attendance, and academic performance over the project lifecycle.
- Enhanced institutional capacity of local municipal bodies and partner CBOs to independently manage alternative care and child protection cases.

Timeline

Months 1-3: Stakeholder alignment, baseline surveys, recruitment of project staff, and establishment of community advisory committees. **Months 4-9:** Vulnerability mapping, institutional child assessments, and initiation of family preservation and livelihood grants. **Months 10-18:** Execution of family reintegration plans, foster care placements, and rollout of psychosocial and educational support services. **Months 19-22:** Intensive post-placement monitoring, peer support group facilitation, and vocational skills graduation. **Months 23-24:** Project evaluation, documentation of best practices, handover of community monitoring systems to local government, and final reporting.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project will employ a robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework to track progress against predefined output and outcome indicators. A dedicated M&E officer will oversee data collection using digital case management software, ensuring strict data privacy and confidentiality for all minors. Qualitative and quantitative data will be gathered through monthly case worker reports, quarterly household surveys, school attendance logs, and semi-structured interviews with children, caregivers, and local authorities. Mid-term and end-term evaluations will be conducted by an independent external evaluator to assess project efficacy, ensure accountability to donors and beneficiaries, and allow for adaptive management in response to emerging contextual challenges.

Risks and Mitigation

Risk: Resistance from institutional facility operators who view reintegration as a threat to their funding and operations. **Mitigation:** Engage proactively with facility management, framing the transition as compliance with national legal mandates and offering technical support for their conversion into community resource centers. **Risk:** Economic shocks or inflation diminishing the impact of livelihood grants. **Mitigation:** Provide inflation-adjusted grants, comprehensive business mentorship, and linkage to local agricultural and vocational cooperatives. **Risk:** Stigmatization of reintegrated children within schools and local communities. **Mitigation:** Conduct community-wide awareness campaigns, sensitize school teachers, and foster inclusive peer activities through local youth clubs.

Sustainability

Sustainability is embedded in the core design of the Aanchal project through deep institutional embedding and community empowerment. Rather than creating parallel systems, the project builds the capacity of municipal child welfare committees, local social workers, and volunteer community networks to manage child protection cases independently. Livelihood interventions are designed to be self-sustaining within 12 months through micro-savings groups and linkages with local government poverty alleviation programs. Furthermore, by working closely with local government bodies to allocate municipal budget lines for alternative care, the project ensures that successful community-based models continue long after donor funding concludes.

Project Management

The project will be managed by an experienced team based in Kathmandu, led by a Project Director with over 12 years of experience in child protection and social sector programming in Nepal. The core team includes a Senior Child Protection Specialist, a Livelihood Coordinator, three Caseworkers, and an M&E Officer. Financial management and administrative oversight will be handled by the organization's central finance department in accordance with international accounting standards and rigorous internal controls. A Project Steering Committee comprising representatives from local municipal authorities, child welfare boards, and community elders will meet quarterly to provide strategic guidance, review progress reports, and ensure transparent governance.

Budget Overview

Personnel (Project Director, Case Workers, M&E Officer, Specialists)	\$52,000
Family Reintegration, Transition, and Emergency Preservation Grants	\$38,000
Livelihood Training and Micro-Grant Packages for 150 Households	\$30,000
Psychosocial Support, Remedial Education, and Child-Friendly Activities	\$15,000
Capacity Building, Workshops, and Stakeholder Training Modules	\$12,000
Monitoring, Evaluation, External Audits, and Reporting	\$8,000
Administrative, Office Operations, and Travel Costs	\$15,000
Total Requested Grant	\$170,000

Conclusion

Every child deserves the unconditional warmth, security, and developmental foundation that only a family and community can provide. For too long, institutional care has been treated as an acceptable default for vulnerable children in Nepal, perpetuating cycles of separation and trauma. The Aanchal project offers a proven, rights-based, and compassionate roadmap to dismantle this harmful status quo, empowering families to stay together and safely returning institutionalized children to the loving homes they deserve. With the generous support of the Foundation, this initiative will transform hundreds of young lives, strengthen local civil society, and set a powerful benchmark for alternative care reform across Nepal.



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